

Today Rep. Pete Stark and several members of Congress introduced the Medikids Health Insurance Act of 2001, with companion legislation introduced in the Senate by Senator Jay Rockefeller. The bill provides universal health insurance for the nation's children through a new federal program modeled after Medicare, but with benefits tailored toward children.

"Although we have made progress in the past several years addressing the problem of children who lack health insurance, over ten million children remain uninsured," Rep. Stark said. "In a country awash in surpluses, there is no excuse for any child to grow up without basic health care. Our legislation seeks to correct this injustice. Will it cost money? Of course. But investing in our children will benefit our nation much more than spending all our federal resources on tax breaks for those who are already well-off."

Senator Rockefeller stated: "Our children deserve nothing less than the best care we can provide them and MediKids will bring us one step further in achieving that goal."

The MediKids Health Insurance Act of 2001 creates a new federal health insurance program modeled after Medicare. The benefit package is improved to meet the needs of children and would, at a minimum, match the full benefits in Medicaid today. Most importantly, all children would be enrolled in MediKids at birth and would remain enrolled in the program until age 23. Parents who have other coverage for their children, employer provided, individual marketplace etc., could maintain that coverage. If that coverage were ever taken away, however, their children would automatically have MediKids coverage. MediKids is financed like the Medicare Part B program with families paying a premium of 25% of the value of the program and the rest financed through general revenues. Premiums for MediKids would be collected each year when parents file their taxes. There is also a generous low-income subsidy program that phases out between 150% - 300% of poverty.

The MediKids legislation is supported by a wide range of children's health and advocacy groups as well as the doctors who care for children. Supporting organizations include: the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children's Defense Fund, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Consumers Union, the March of Dimes, the National Association of Community Health Centers, the National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems, the National Health Law Program, and NETWORK: a Catholic Social Justice lobby.

Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund offered her organization's strong endorsement of the Medikids Health Insurance Act of 2001: "Your legislation reminds Congress, the Bush administration, and the nation of the importance of insuring every

uninsured child. Rhetoric about how we value children will ring hollow until we back it up with substance. Your legislation is the kind of substance essential to making our pledges to children ring true.”

Rep. Stark concluded: “Children are the least expensive segment of our population to insure, and maintaining their health is integral to the future of our society. Providing health care coverage to children impacts more than just their health -- it impacts their ability to learn, their ability to thrive, and their ability to become productive members of society. MediKids simplifies the confusing array of health insurance assistance programs for children today and guarantees them coverage until adulthood. I look forward to working with my colleagues to move forward on this important initiative for the health of our nation’s children.”